

POSITION PAPER ON CHALLENGE OPTIONS FOR OLDER CADETS

1. Civil Air Patrol currently makes no accommodations for cadets who join the program at an older age than the minimum of 12 years old. Such cadets, having less time until their 21st birthday, are necessarily at a disadvantage in completing the Cadet Program in the time allotted. Similarly, these older cadets may find themselves under the command or supervision of cadets who are younger in age, but have been in the Cadet Program longer. It has been suggested by National Headquarters that this hurts the retention of older cadets because they are unwilling to answer to younger cadets, and a number of solutions have been suggested for this problem.
2. The original proposal was to allow individuals, who were 16 or older, to “challenge” the Wright Brothers Award Examination by attempting it, in a similar manner to a college placement examination. This would be done with the permission of the Squadron Commander, and an individual would only be allowed to “challenge” the exam one time. If they passed the test (including the Physical Fitness and all other applicable requirements), they would be immediately promoted to the grade of C/SSgt.
3. This proposal met with some animosity during the 2004-2005 term of the National Cadet Advisory Council. Another proposal was circulated in which cadets who are aged 16 or older could receive accelerated progression through the program, in the same way that AFJROTC cadets are treated. In this proposal, 16 year old and older cadets can be promoted at a rate of 1 achievement a month until the Mitchell Award, thus allowing them to advance more quickly through the program.
4. The National Cadet Advisory Council views both of these as poor ideas. The rationale that is given behind each of the proposals is that older cadets may feel that younger cadets should not be in charge of them. Therefore, in order to help retain these older cadets, we should offer them a chance to take on higher positions sooner in the program. The logic behind this rationale, however, is flawed. It supposes that cadets who are unable to follow a younger leader should be advanced in grade, which would allow them to skip the practical followership experience which should allow them to follow the younger leader in the first place.
5. The options proposed by National Headquarters are, therefore, self-fulfilling prophecies. They purport to answer the very problems which they create. In addition, the council feels that by tying promotions to age in this way, younger cadets will be disheartened. They will see cadets who are only slightly older receiving significant benefits, while they slog under a completely different set of rules. By establishing two different sets of rules, we are establishing two classes of cadets. While the council has, in the past, recommended establishing age limits on the milestone awards, this serves to establish a common standard across the

board. It states “Every cadet who has X Award is at least Y years of age”, not “Cadets who are at least Y years of age get to go faster because they are older”. There exists a large difference between these two.

6. In conclusion, it is the opinion of the council that basing the method by which cadets progress through the program on age in the manner described will not solve the problems the program faces. While retention of older cadets is a serious issue which is facing the Cadet Program, the methods proposed so far all seem to be aimed at solving a problem which they themselves will exasperate. The solution to retaining cadets in the Cadet Program is not to make the program easier, but to make it more engaging. As has been shown many times before, the Cadet Program is most successful when cadets take ownership of the program. Establishing double standards and promoting older cadets so they do not answer to younger cadets will encourage the wrong mentality in the Cadet Program.

On behalf of the council,

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